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INFO RUEHZS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS PRIORITY

RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA PRIORITY 9128

RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON PRIORITY 2484

RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 1775

RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING PRIORITY 6442

RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL PRIORITY 4989

RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 1129

RUEHCHI/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI PRIORITY 5752

RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY

RUEAAIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY

RHHMUNA/USCINCPAC HONOLULU HI PRIORITY

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BANGKOK 003209

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP/MLS
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TAGS: PGOV PREL PINR KDEM ASEC MOPS TH

SUBJECT: THAI SUPREME COMMANDER ASSURES AMBASSADOR THAT
THERE WILL BE NO COUP

REF: BANGKOK 3143

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Classified By: Ambassador Eric G. John, reasons 1.4 (b) and d)

¶1. (C) Summary. Thai Armed Forces Supreme Commander General Songkitti Jaggabartra told the Ambassador on October 24 that the Thai military would not stage a coup. The military was committed to working with Prime Minister Somchai and to helping the country through constitutional means. Songkitti said a coup would not solve the political conflict as the pro-Thaksin People's Power Party (PPP) or its successor would win the next election anyway.

¶2. (C) Comment. Songkitti demonstrated a compelling understanding of why a coup would not solve the current conflict and that such action would only postpone political reconciliation. The Supreme Commander's statements that there would be no coup were a reassuring confirmation of Army Commander General Anupong's continuing public and private assurances that the military would not become involved in politics. End Summary and comment.

A COUP IS NOT THE SOLUTION

¶3. (C) During an October 24 meeting with Royal Thai Armed Forces Supreme Commander General Songkitti Jaggabartra, the Ambassador stressed the USG position that a coup would not be acceptable. Songkitti said the Thai military would not stage a coup, as such action would hurt the nation and not solve the underlying political and societal problems. People had misunderstood Royal Thai Army Commander General Anupong Paochinda's October 16 comments on TV, Songkitti said. The Army Commander had not said the Prime Minister should resign; rather Anupong had only said he would resign if he were the PM.

¶4. (C) Songkitti placed blame for the current conflict on political actors who were trying to exploit a perceived split between the PPP-led government and the military. Songkitti told the Ambassador that the Thai military would stay neutral

and would respect the democratic process and the constitution. The anti-government People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD) had been trying to gain the backing of the military, as the group would not prevail without the military's support. The military, however, was committed to working with Prime Minister and Defense Minister Somchai in carrying out its duty to defend the country and to resolve security challenges. Songkitti told the Ambassador that he and General Anupong had had a friendly meeting with Somchai after an October 23 royal ceremony. The two military leaders had also met with Somchai earlier in the week to discuss the border conflict with Cambodia in advance of the Prime Minister's October 24 talks with Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen (note: in Beijing, as part of the ASEM meetings).

MEDIA NOT REPORTING THE TRUTH

¶ 15. (C) Songkitti said the Thai media was not accurately reporting the state of affairs. The media was trying to create a problem which did not exist by only reporting signs of apparent bad blood between Anupong and the Prime Minister.

The true story was that the Thai military would continue to support the government through constitutional avenues, Songkitti said. The military would not fall into the trap represented by intervention in the political process.

¶ 16. (C) The Ambassador reiterated to Songkitti that a coup would set back the process of resolving the political conflict. The 2006 coup had postponed by at least a year and a half any progress towards compromise. Songkitti agreed and said a coup every two years would only work against solving the real problems within the political system. Songkitti

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expressed his wish that the U.S. and others would use their private meetings with Thai politicians to influence them in a positive way, i.e., that they should carry out their work for the good of the nation and not for personal benefit. Songkitti noted that the conflict had divided Thailand into red pro-PPP/Thaksin and yellow anti-government provinces. This was a grave state of affairs, Songkitti said, the consequence of which was a country that could not be governed effectively.

THAKSIN SHOULD CALL FOR RECONCILIATION

¶ 17. (C) The Ambassador asked Songkitti for his assessment of former-Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra's plans to address a November 1 pro-government mass rally in Bangkok via a telephone or video link from abroad. Songkitti expressed hope that Thaksin would call on all parties to think of the country and to bring themselves to compromise for the greater good. The Thai people should sacrifice for the benefit of the nation so that upcoming events, such as the funeral for the King's sister, the King's birthday, and the ASEAN Summit, could be successfully completed.

RESPECT THE RULE OF LAW

¶ 18. (C) The Ambassador asked the Supreme Commander for his view of how the Thai government and the military would respond if there were further violence, particularly a clash between pro- and anti-government groups. Songkitti said the Thai government should follow the rule of law. As such, the Thai police would be responsible for maintaining order. The street clash September 2 between the PAD and its pro-government rival, the United Front for Democracy Against Dictatorship (UDD), showed, however, that the police were not always capable in keeping the peace, Songkitti said. After the September 2 emergency declaration (lifted by Somchai September 14) by then-Prime Minister Samak Sundaravej that had allowed for the deployment of a small number of soldiers, the two sides had quickly retreated. The Ambassador stressed

that violence by demonstrators on either side of the political divide should not be a pretext for a coup, the Supreme Commander agreed.

JOHN